November  
30, 2009**P r o t e c t e d : M e h**Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#)

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December  
20, 2008**8**Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#)[Leave a Comment](#)

I went Christmas shopping, and actually enjoyed it.

March 5,  
2008**I ' m n o t c r a z y**Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [internet](#), [language](#), [random](#), [weird](#) |[1 Comment](#)

Following the random walk of the internet I came across something called the [knowledge web](#), basically a really funky micro internet with more educational material and less porn. Inspired by a guy named James Burke who apparently once had a TV series named 'Connections' where he explored the surprisingly diverse influences and events that led to modern inventions such as the aeroplane and the computer.

The knowledge web is based on the idea that modern education is encouraging us to be too specialised and we lack the ability to see the big picture and how our field of expertise is related to other ones. It's also hoped that it'll help people discover whole new topics that are related to subjects they happen to be reading up on, or just stumble across interesting stuff. This is what I do all the time, and *you thought I was wasting my life*. Ha. I'm actually more modern than you.

As an illustration, I came across this while reading about [Interlingua](#), Esperanto's sexier and more modern sibling. This got me to reading about SF author Heinlein's book [Gulf](#) which included a fictional language based on using every distinct sound from every human language (about 100) varying the pitch,

**T a g s**[blogs](#) [buckminster fuller](#)[china](#) [chinese characters](#)[current events](#) [future](#) [history](#)[internet](#) [korea](#)[language](#)[random](#) [space](#)[sparta](#) [trance](#) [travel](#) [weird](#)[wikipedia](#)

duration etc to get about 800 different sounds, and then mapping these to the vocabulary of Basic English. So one sound would equal one word, and you could communicate intelligently through these exotic grunts about four times faster than normal boring languages. An interesting libertarian website that had some good articles about Heinlein was linked to by a blog [whose author traced an interesting chain of links he'd followed that day](#). This involved something called 'mirror neurons' which could be the secret behind our ability to empathise. Anyway, since his blog involved an interesting trail about connections, he referenced James Burke and his classic series. Which I promptly googled, and later found out about his new knowledge web project. A promotional video for the kweb illustrated how the inventor of the computer, Charles Babbage, had a crush on Lord Byron's daughter, Ada Lovelace (the same Lord Byron who knew Mary Shelly who wrote Frankenstein which first introduced the questions of biologists messing with what it means to be human, connecting computers to bioethics through Romantic writers...) Turns out Ada is considered the world's first computer programmer, which got me to reading a Wikipedia article about the lack of women involved in computing.

Totally unconnectedly, turns out H G Wells, like Vannevar Bush and his Memex, also foresaw something like the internet (he called it the [World Brain](#)) being constructed with microfilm technology. And in Japan, there exist special [Nyotaimori](#) restaurants for people who want to eat their sushi of a naked woman.



March 3,  
2008

**S o m e t i m e s   i n   t h e   f  
w i l l   b e   r i g h t**

Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [buckminster fuller](#), [future](#),

[internet](#), [random](#), [trance](#) |

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Yeah, we've all seen the quotes from folks of yesteryear saying that either there'll only five computers will ever be sold, or, alternatively, that we'll be living on the moon by 1960. I could look up a bank of quotes to reinforce this but there'd be no point, and, more importantly, I'm very lazy.

Anyway, sometimes people in the past made some pretty good projections. Stuff that, to some degree, has actually happened. Brave New World portrayed our present society, with its mass entertainment and political correctness and convenience culture, pretty well for fifty years ago. (Don't talk to me about 1984, which is a good book but is annoyingly becoming fuel for Rage Against the Machine fans and their non-rock-fan equivalents, who circulate 9-11 conspiracy videos and think not being allowed to download pirate mp3s is a sign of fascist oppression. That kind of world is not going to come to pass. I think we've got enough real problems to deal with and we don't need to lose our focus </rant>).

Also, [As We May Think](#), a 1945 article by Vannevar Bush about why, instead of making nukes and other ways of increasing humanity's physical power, science should be focused on ways on increasing our mental power. He talks about tiny cameras and possible applications of computing, but most interesting is where he discusses ideas of something that we would call hypertext.

At the time, microfilm was the exciting new information technology, so his ideas revolve around that. But you can't expect Nostradamus-like predictive power, and if you replace microfilm with computer/webpage/etc, he was pretty prescient. Somehow it doesn't feel that surprising that he got a few things right, as although he's open-minded about the prospects of new technology, he doesn't

get into mad flights of speculative fancy

He talks about compressing exabytes of data into tiny spaces, and most interestingly, how to navigate this overwhelming sea of information. He wasn't a fan of indexing, and instead thought that a system based on the brain's way of associating concepts was the way forward, an idea we'd recognise as a hyperlink. His idea of an 'associative trail', however, doesn't seem to have been realised yet.

He gives an example of how someone, researching the difference between English and Turkish bows, finds himself studying the elasticity of the various materials used and how this was a critical element. He adds his own annotations to the pages he studies (the electronic equivalent of scribbling in the margin) and makes his own links between pages as he builds his 'associative trail'. This can be saved and then recalled for future use.

Obviously this is just a summary, the article itself goes into much more detail. It's worth reading, but you might want to skim over the first three pages – the really interesting stuff is to be found on the last page.

Anyway, I got to thinking about how such a system could work in the internet age. Maybe a toolbar (a small and unobtrusive one) would save annotations to pages and associative trails created, which you could look up when you returned to that particular subject. By keeping track of your websites visited, and perhaps optionally inputting personal details, the toolbar would provide you with annotations and trails from like-minded people.

On a side-trail, I found out about the [Dymaxion Chronicle](#), where Buckminster Fuller – known for geodesic domes and popularising, if not coining, the word 'debunked' – chronicled his entire life, keeping copies of letters, diary entries and dry-cleaning bills, along with newspaper articles to provide historical context.

Totally unrelatedly I stumbled across [Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music](#), a snazzy mindmap of the development from pretentious arty Musique Concrete to commercialised McTrance and everything in between. With bite-sized histories of trance/techno/electronica's confusing palette of genres, and samples of major tracks from each one. Even if you think you've got no interest in that style of music it's worth an explore. This is what the internet age should be giving us.



February  
28, 2008

W o r l d ' s M o s t D a n g e

Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [china](#), [chinese characters](#),  
[random](#) |

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These kids in Nujiang, China, have to zipwire over a river twice a day to get to and from their school, which conveniently lies on the other side of the river. What they lack in bridge, they make up for in hardcore.

Which reminds me, I'm falling behind with my studying Chinese. My New Year's Resolution was to learn one character a day... here's the one for *bridge*, 'qiao'.

□



February  
26, 2008

## H o w I w a s t e m y l i f e

Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [china](#), [current events](#), [history](#), [korea](#), [language](#), [random](#), [space](#), [sparta](#), [travel](#), [wikipedia](#) |

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Here is a small selection of interesting things and aids to procrastination gained from a typical day's internet browsing. The day in question is 21st February, last Thursday. It's in roughly alphabetical order, but naturally quite a few are linked so I've put items on the same topic together. Enjoy.

[comebackalive.com](#) is a site for travellers who like to go to the most dangerous regions in the world. For the fact fans: the number one travellers to war zones are businessmen. I also liked their [list of all ongoing wars and conflicts](#).

[polosbastards.com](#) is a similar site; the link leads to their list of the world's top ten worst destinations. Iraq scores number one.

Kessler Syndrome

An [Ablation\\_cascade](#) is an event where a satellite is destroyed, and then the resulting high-velocity shards of satellite debris destroy other satellites, and so on, starting a chain

reaction that could not only knock out your Sky TV reception but could also mean that the spaceships of future generations, sent out on missions to seek out new life and new civilisations/conquer

the universe, are destroyed by bits of 21st century scrap metal before they even get out of orbit. We'd be imprisoned on this small and uninteresting planet by a wall of our own rubbish.

Just supposing that there was some island of the coast of China that they might want to invade, but the US had pledged to defend, it's possible that they could use their new anti-satellite rockets to shoot down some of America's eyes in the sky, blinding the Yank's military planners long enough to gain a foothold on said island. China's destruction of a weather satellite last year created a lot of space junk, but the US is working on technology that would allow it to be a more conscientious space warrior – one plan is to defunctionalise satellites by firing sheets of plastic film at them which would wrap around them and render them inoperable.

Sparta was the only Greek city without walls – according to legend the lack of defence was intended to motivate the Spartans to be more hardcore.

Every autumn, the Spartan government would declare war on the Helots – the Spartan serfs – and the Krypteia, an organisation of the strongest and most able young men who had just completed their training, would roam the countryside at night, killing any Helots they came across and stealing their food.

KT Tunstall is a quarter Chinese, quarter Scottish and half Irish. Bloc Party's drummer is also part Chinese.

The English phrases “long time no see” “no can do” “look-see” and “no go” are all believed to come from Chinglish.

The Financial Times reckons that for 18 of the past 20 centuries, China has been the world's largest economy.

Hangul is the phonetic alphabet created for Korean in 1444 by the King Sejong the Great. Previously, modified Chinese characters were used, so only the educated elite could write. King Sejong may have had to work on Hangul in secret because of the opposition of scholars. The new letters were said to be so simple that “a wise man can acquaint himself with them before the morning is over; a stupid man can learn them in the space of ten days.”

Brush 궁체  
Serif 바탕  
Gothic 돋움

This high-school science teacher has made a suprisingly popular video about global warming, and why it's important we take action even if the fact's aren't 100% clear yet. It's 10 minutes long and worth watching.

Word of the day: holus-bolus, an adverb meaning “all together, unmodified”, as in “he accepted the story holus-bolus.”

The [Isle of Man](#) is home to the world's oldest parliament, the Tynwald. Fuck you Iceland and take your Althing with you.

Korean has no less than [seven speech levels](#), ranging from Hasoseoche, for talking to Royalty and now only used in the Bible and historical dramas, through Haoche, which is only really spoken by older people but used by the youth as an internet dialect, down to Haeche, which is for talking to close friends and family, strange children, and picking fights.

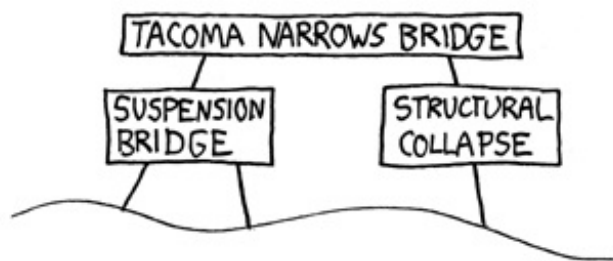
The US Citizenship and Immigration Services reckon that [mail-order brides](#) and their mail-ordering grooms have a lower divorce rate than the general population; 80 percent of these marriages have lasted compared to between 40 and 60 percent of American marriages in general ending in divorce.

Many unrelated languages of the world use the words "[mama](#)" and "[papa](#)"/"[baba](#)" to refer to mother and father. This is believed to be because 'a' is one of the first vowels to be learned and the sounds 'b', 'p', and 'm' are labial (made with the lips) sounds and are usually the first that babies suss out. Proud parents across the world hearing their offspring making their first sounds tend to assume that they're the ones being talked about. It's not always the case though; Japanese 'mama' and Spanish 'papa' both mean food, another vital component of baby's universe.

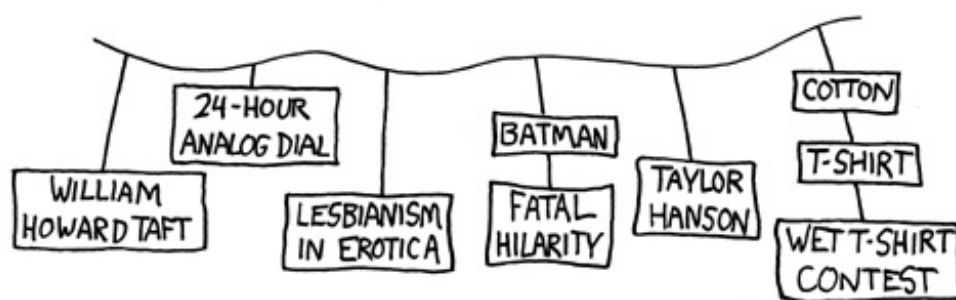
That singing guy with the guitar who annoys JD in one episode of Scrubs is called Colin Hay. On that episode he was singing his song [Overkill](#).

There. A not atypical day for me. If you followed some of the links, you'll notice that one website seems to dominate. One website that leads to certain personality types wasting their lives. One website that, if not the world's premier collection of information, certainly the best one with hyperlinks. I think this [xkcd](#) cartoon says it all:

## THE PROBLEM WITH WIKIPEDIA:



[THREE HOURS OF  
FASCINATED CLICKING]



And I've just found on their forums a topic about [Awesomely Random Wikipedia Entries](#). Goodbye next few hours and everything else I was planning to do today

...



February  
24, 2008

### Hello world !

Posted by Isaac under [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [blogs](#) |

[1 Comment](#)

I used to be against blogs, they seemed to be either pretentious or vacuous (or that's what I'd heard about them), but after keeping one in China I can see the benefits of having somewhere to announce random announcements, muse random musings and opine random opinions.

The [Phantasmagorical Adventures of Ren Ming](#) is going to be replaced by this now. That blog started out as a way of keeping people posted on what I was up to - a glorified round-robin e-mail - though by the end it had turned into a personal record, a way to detail everything that happened to me. I still feel like a large chunk of China action - most of my time travelling - has yet to be posted, but I've got no motivation to do it. I've got a stack of photos for memories, and the really memorable stuff I don't think I'll ever forget. (That's why it's *memorable*.)

Anyway, this blog'll be different. There's no point doing a day by day account of my life, largely because life in Shotton is REALLY FUCKING BORING. Also I'm going

to swear in this one, I've just decided. The content will be a random mix of whatever I feel like, but may include anecdotes, political screeds, rants, reviews, stuff I'm interested in and projects I'm working on.

...

